

CHRISTMAS.

ANNIE'S AND WILLIE'S PRAYER.
Twas the eve before Christmas; "Good night" had been said, And Annie and Willie had crept into bed; There were tears on their pillows, and tears in their eyes, And each little bosom was heavy with sighs.

For to-night their stern father's command had been given, That they should retire precisely at seven; Instead of at eight; for they troubled him more.

With questions unheard of than ever before.

He had told them he thought this delusion a sin, No such being as "Santa Claus" ever had been.

And he hoped, after this, he should never more hear.

How he scrambled down chimneys with presents each year.

And this was the reason that two little heads So restlessly tossed on their soft, downy beds.

Eight nine, and the clock on the steeple tolled ten;

Not a word had been spoken by either till then.

When Willie's sad face from the blanket did peep.

And whispered, "Dear Annie, is you fast asleep?"

"Why, no, brother Willie," a sweet voice replies,

"I've tried it in vain, but I can't shut my eyes;

For, somehow, it makes me so sorry because

Dear papa has said there was no Santa Claus."

Now we know there is, and it can't be denied,

For he came every year before mamma died;

But then, I've been thinking that she used to pray,

And God would hear everything mamma would say,

And perhaps she asked him to send Santa Claus here,

With the sacks full of presents he brought every year."

"Well, why can't we pay dest as mamma did then,

And ask him to send him with presents again?"

"I've been thinking so, too," and without a word more,

Four little bare feet bounded out on the floor;

And four little knees the soft carpet pressed,

And two tiny hands were clasped close to each breast;

"Now Willie, you know we must firmly believe

That the presents we ask for we're sure to receive;

You must wait just as still till I say the Amen."

And by that you will know that yourturn has come then."

"Dear Jesus, look down on my brother and me,

And grant us the favor we are asking of thee;

I want a wax dolly, a tea-set and ring.

And an ebony box that shuts with a spring;

Bless papa, dear Jesus, and cause him to see

That Santa Claus loves us far better than he.

Don't let him get fretful and angry again

At dear brother Willie and Annie. Amen!"

"Please, Jesus, 't Santa Claus turn down to-night,

And bring us some presents before it is light,

I want he should give me a nice 'ittle sed,

With bright, shiny runners, and all painted yed;

A box full of tandy, a book and a toy.

Amen, and then, Jesus, I'll be a good boy."

Their prayers being ended, they raised up their heads,

And with hearts light and cheerful again sought their beds.

They were soon lost in slumber, both peaceful and deep;

And with fairies in Dreamland were roaming in sleep.

Eight, nine, and the little French clock struck ten;

Ere the father had thought of his children again;

He seems now to hear Annie's half-suppressed sighs;

And to see the big tears stand in Willie's blue eyes.

"I was harsh with my darlings," he mentally said,

"And should not have sent them so early to bed;

But then I was troubled—my feelings found vent,

For bank stock to-day has gone down ten per cent;

But of course they've forgotten their troubles are this,

And that I denied them the thrice asked for kiss;

But just to make sure, I'll steal up to their door,

•So saying, he softly ascended the stairs,

And arrived at the door to hear both of their prayers.

His Annie's "bless papa" draws forth the big tears,

And Willie's grave promise falls sweet on his ears.

"Strange, strange, I'd forgotten," said he, with a sigh.

"How I longed, when a child, to have

Christmas draw nigh,

I'm sorry for my harshness," he inwardly said,

By answering their prayers ere I sleep in my bed."

Then he turned to the stairs, and softly went down,

Threw off velvet slippers and silk dressing gowns;

Dressed hot, coat and boots, and was out in the street.

A millionaires facing the cold, driving sleet,

Not stopped him until he had bought everything,

From the box full of candy to the tiny gold ring.

Indeed, he kept adding so much to his store,

That the various presents outnumbered a score.

Then homeward he turned with his holiday load.

And with Aunt Mary's aid in the nursery was stowed;

Miss Dolly was seated beneath a pine tree,

By the side of a table spread out for tea;

A work box, well-filled in the centre was laid,

And on it a ring for which Annie had prayed.

A soldier in uniform stood by a sled,

"With bright, shining runners, and all painted red."

There were bales, dogs and horses, books pleasing to see,

And birds of all colors were perched in the tree;

While Santa Claus, laughing, stood up in the top.

As if getting ready more presents to drop. And as the fond father the picture surveyed, He thought for his trouble he had amply been paid.

And he said to himself, as he brushed off a tear, "I'm happier to-night than I've been for a year.

I've enjoyed more true pleasure than ever before.

What care I if bank stock fall ten cents more?"

Hereafter I'll make it a rule, I believe,

To have Santa Claus visit us each Christmas eve."

So thinking by gently extinguished the light.

And tripped down the stairs to retire for the night.

As soon as the beams of the bright morning sun Put the darkness to flight, and the stars one by one,

Four little blue eyes out of sleep opened wide,

And at the same moment the presents opened.

Then out of their beds they sprang with a bound,

And the very gifts prayed for were all of them found.

They laughed and they cried in their innocent glee.

And shouted for "papa" to come quick see What presents old Santa Claus brought in the night.

Just the things that they wanted) and left before light.

"And now," added Annie, in a voice soft and low,

"You believe there's a Santa Claus, papa, I know."

While dear little Willie climbed up on his knees,

Determined no secret between them should be.

And told in soft whispers, how Annie had said,

That their dear, blessed mamma, so long ago dead,

Used to kneel down and pray by the side of her chair,

And that God up in Heaven had answered her prayer!

"Den don't up and payed dust as well as we could,"

And Dod answered our prayers: now wasn't he good?"

I should say that he was, if he sent you all these,

And knew just what presents my children would please.

(Well, well, let him think so, the dear little sot.)

Would be cruel to tell him I did it myself!"

Blind father! who caused your stern heart to relent!

And the hasty word spoke so soon to repeat?

Twas the Being who made you steal softly up stairs,

And made you his agent to answer their prayers.

After Dinner.

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THE DECAY OF THE HOME FEELING.

We have noticed remarks in some journals upon the change which seems to be coming over the manner of observing our Thanksgiving festivals. The traditional feasting and joviality remain, but the occasions are less prominently gatherings at home than they used to be. They are no longer looked forward to as the great family event of the year, for which supreme efforts must be made by all the members to join each other around the old fireside.

Now, so many as can do so without inconvenience will honor the occasion with their presence; others will stay away upon slight excuse, and the party will be made up by inviting in friends and neighbors.

The comprehensive, exclusive family gatherings of past Thanksgivings grow rarer every year, and threaten to become obsolete.

The change of which we speak would be of little importance if it concerned only the way in which a particular festival should be celebrated, for this is a point subject to fashion. It is the result of influences which are altering the aspects of our whole social life. In view of the nature of these influences and of their ultimate tendency it becomes a subject of grave consideration.

The ties of American family life are undergoing a weakening process. Fashion, the restless spirit of surprise, the recklessness of speculation, the activity which sends men to the four corners of the earth at a few hours' notice, bid fair to destroy them, and to extinguish the old-fashioned love of home. Young men do not think of settling down in the old place. Their first impulse when they are old enough is to go away. They remove to the West, emigrate to a foreign land, or become travellers by business. The yearly journey back to the homestead becomes inconvenient. It is given up, and the old place is forgotten, or is remembered only as a dull, old-fashioned spot, whose stupid life is fortunate to have exchanged for that of a more "go-ahead," money-making world.

The excuse is made that the visit will take up time, and involve trouble and expense which cannot be afforded. It is a mere pretext. Our fathers had to trudge through overland roads; they were days in traversing distances that we pass over in hours; the dimes they spent were worth as much to them as the dollars we deal in; they never found the journey too long, or troublesome, or expensive, but made it if they had to economize for the whole of the rest of the year. The real cause of the disuse of the good old custom is that we care less for home than our fathers did, and will not endure the pains they took to get back there. The prevailing object and views of life are different from what they were. Greed and a craving for excitement are taking the place of the domestic affection and attachment for the old places which once ruled.

Parents chase as passing away, and remove to join their children, or sell the old place and go to town to live. The home, in the hands of strongs, is no longer home; the new place never gets so naturalized as to seem home. Speculation invades the neighborhood which had been given up to quiet and domesticity. Railroads, property becomes valuable, the farm is cut up into building lots, the house is torn down, or turned into a shop or tenement. How many hearts have been wrench